

# Geography A Level – Preparatory Work 2026

## Recommended Reading Materials:

### A Level Geography Textbook suggestions:

Dunn, C., et al, Edexcel AS/A Level Geography Book 1, Hodder 2021 4<sup>th</sup> ed.

Dunn, C., Student Guide 1: Edexcel Geography – Tectonic processes and hazards, Landscape systems, process and change

Dunn, C., Student Guide 2: Edexcel Geography – Globalisation & shaping places

### Pre-course Wider Reading Suggestions for Geography A Level:

Prisoners of Geography, Tim Marshall

Any of these 5 books from Hodder's A- Level Geography Topic Master Series:

Changing Places

Coastal Landscapes

Glaciated Landscapes

Global Governance

Global Systems

The Water and Carbon Cycles

### Documentaries/TV

Any of the Life & Planet Earth Series Box Sets - David Attenborough

Any of Iain Stewart's documentaries – especially:

Earth: The Power of the Planet (2007)

How Earth Made Us (2010)

Rise of the Continents (2013)

An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

Al Gore's ground-breaking climate change documentary.

### Films

The Impossible (2012)

Harrowing movie about the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami which killed over 200,000 people

Slumdog Millionaire (2008)

Life in the slums of Mumbai

Brassed off (1996)

Comedy set during the decline of the UK coal industry in the 1990s

Supervolcano (2008)

Docu-drama set during a possible future VEI 8 eruption of the Yellowstone volcano in the USA

Flood (2007)

Disaster movie - Possible future storm surge overwhelms the Thames Barrier and floods London

## Websites:

Have a look around the Royal Geographical Society (<https://www.rgs.org>) and the Geographical Association ([www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)) websites. Virtual fieldwork to get you thinking about geographical skills – <https://www.geography-fieldwork.org/>

## Optional tasks to complete:

### Task 1: Read through the specification for the Pearson's Edexcel Geography A level

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/geography-2016.html>

### Task 2: The 15 specialised geographical concepts

There are 15 specialist geographical concepts that keep appearing throughout the Edexcel A Level Geography specification. These concepts are often complex and difficult to define. Try to research what some of these 15 specialised concepts mean

Specialist Geographical Concept	Physical or Human Geography?
Causality	<b>Systems theory concepts</b>
<b>Systems</b>	
<b>Feedback</b>	
<b>Equilibrium</b>	
<b>Thresholds</b>	
<b>Risk</b>	
<b>Resilience</b>	
<b>Mitigation and adaptation</b>	
Sustainability	
Interdependence	
Globalisation	<b>Disaster management concepts</b>
Inequality	
<b>Representation</b>	
<b>Identity</b>	
	<b>Physical &amp; Human Geography Concepts</b>
	<b>Human Geography Concepts</b>
	<b>These ideas come from the Concept of Place</b>

### Task 3: Check your basic map skills

The details are on the next page – this is definitely worth a look if you have not done a GCSE Geography qualification.

Bring any work you do to your first geography lesson at college

we look forward to meeting you in September.

Geography Department, Hereford Sixth Form College

# Basic Map Skills

The following is adapted from the BBC Bitesize GCSE revision website. If you have taken a Geography GCSE you should already have the necessary basic maps skills. However, if you did not take geography at GCSE and your map skills have not been utilized since Year 9 or earlier you should have a look at the following.

To read a map you need to understand compass directions, grid references and the map's key and scale. You need to be able to find features when given a map reference. You also need to be able to describe a feature's location on a map by giving a map reference.

## Introduction

Maps are representations of the world created by people called **cartographers** to help other people navigate the world. Maps contain information tailored to a specific purpose.

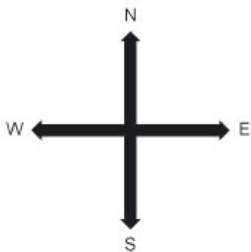
- A **road map**, for example, contains information that helps the reader get from one place to another using a vehicle.
- The maps found in a **geographical atlas** will contain information of less interest to a road user, such as how the land in a place is used, the population density and the political boundaries that exist between regions, states and nations.

There are five fundamental things you need to be familiar with to read a map successfully:

- compass directions
- grid references
- map's key
- title
- scale

## Compass directions

Compass directions are vital for finding your way around a map. There are many ways to remember where each direction goes. You probably learnt a rhyme or a phrase to help you remember - if not, here's one now. Starting at the top and moving clockwise the directions on a compass or map are:



Points of a compass

1. North - Naughty
2. East - Elephants
3. South - Squirt
4. West - Water

# Grid references

OS maps are divided into **numbered squares**. These squares can be used to give a place a four or six-figure grid reference. It is important that you know both **four-figure** and **six-figure** grid references.

## Eastings

Eastings are lines that run up and down the map. They increase in number the further you move east (or right). You can use them to measure how far to travel east.

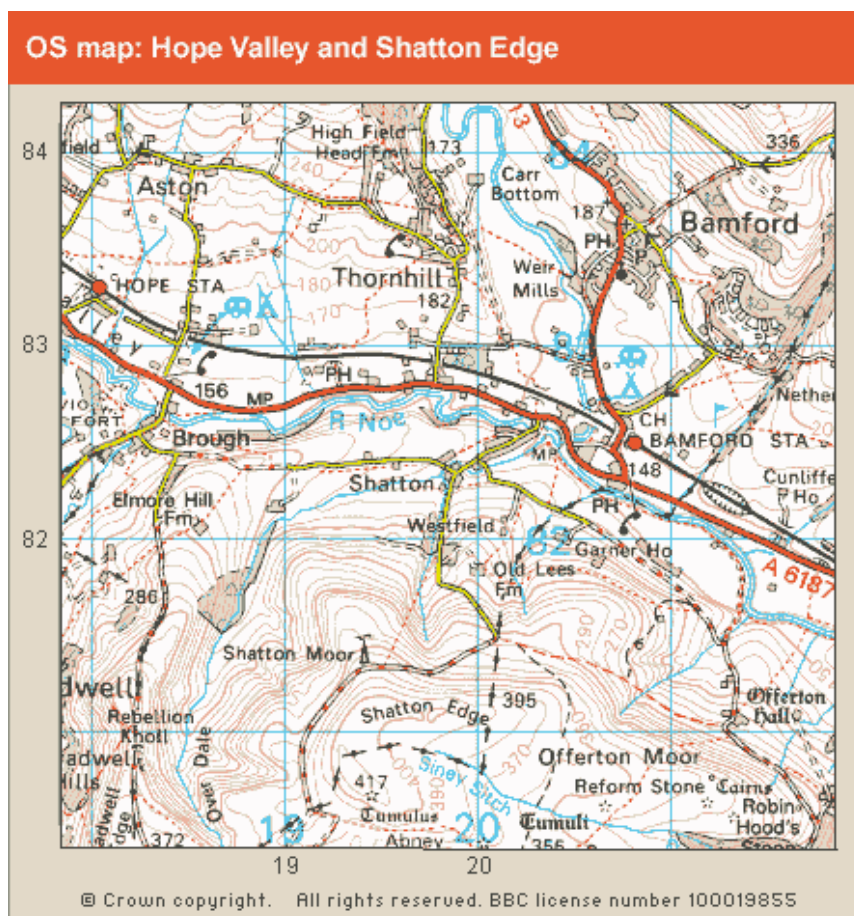
## Northings

Northings are lines that run across the map horizontally. They increase in number the further you move north (or up the map). You can use them to measure how far to travel north.

Remember:

- numbers along the bottom of the map come first and the numbers up the side of the map come second
- the four-figure reference **2083** refers to the square to the **east** of Easting line 20 and **north** of Northing line 83
- the six-figure reference **207834** will give you the exact point in the square **2083** - 7/10s of the way across and 4/10s of the way up

The six-figure reference on the map below shows a **church** in **Bamford**.



# Key

Just like a key to a door, **the key on a map helps you to unlock the information stored in the colours and symbols** on a map. You must understand how the key relates to the map before you can unlock the information it contains. The key will help you to identify types of boundaries, roads, buildings, agriculture, industry, places of interest and geographical features.

## GENERAL FEATURES

- Place of worship
  - with tower
  - with spire, minaret or dome
  - without such additions
- Building; important building
- Glasshouse
- Youth hostel
- Bunkhouse/camping barn
- Bus or coach station
- Lighthouse; beacon

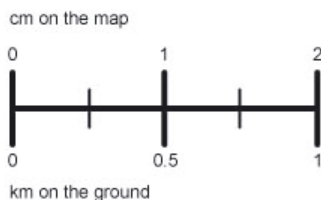
- Gravel pit
- Sand pit
- Other pit or quarry
- Refuse or slag heap
- Triangulation pillar; mast
- Windmill; with or without sails
- Wind pump; wind generator
- Electricity transmission line
- Slopes

- BP Boundary Post
  - BS Boundary Stone
  - CH Club House
  - FB Foot Bridge
  - MP; MS Mile Post; Mile Stone
  - Mon Monument
  - PO Post Office
  - Pol Sta Police Station
  - Sch School
  - TH Town Hall
  - NTL Normal Tidal Limit
  - W; Spr Well; Spring
- } Rural areas only

# Title

Make sure you **read the title** of a map before you start to use it. This will give you a general idea about the information it stores. While it may appear a straightforward thing to do, under exam conditions, it is easy to confuse different maps or not use the one that is most useful.

# Scale



# Map scale

The scale of a map allows a reader to calculate the **size, height and dimensions of the features** shown on the map, as well as distances between different points. The scale on a map is the ratio between real life sizes and how many times it has been shrunk to fit it on the map.

The scale below is for a 1:50,000 scale map. At this scale, 1 cm on the map represents 50,000 cm on the ground (= 500 m or 0.5 km).

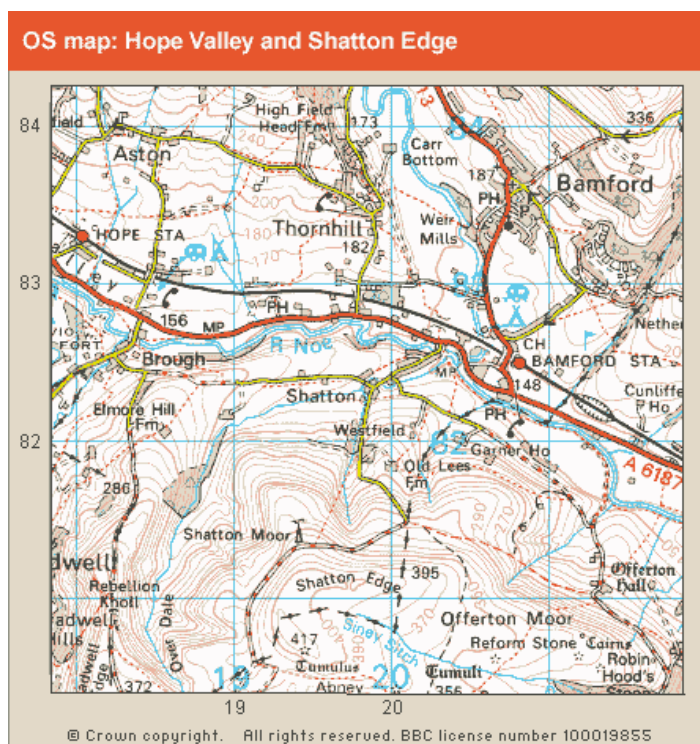
**Ordnance Survey** maps, the most common type of map in the UK, come in several scales.

- Travel maps have a scale of 1:125,000. This means 1 cm on the map represents 125,000 in the real world or 1 cm = 1.25 km. These are used by drivers going long distances.
- Landranger maps are 1:50,000 (1 cm = 500 m). These are useful for drivers going shorter distances.
- Explorer maps are 1:25,000 (1 cm = 250 m). These are useful for walking and other outdoor pursuits.
- Landplan maps are 1:10,000 (1 cm = 100 m). These show individual streets clearly and might be used by town planners.

## Ordnance Survey maps

You will be asked to interpret maps to find out specific information. Being able to distinguish between different types of land use on an Ordnance Survey (OS) map will help you interpret maps during your exams. Here are some things you should brush up on:

- Make sure you can tell the difference between urban and rural land use. Start by looking at the key. Are the features in the key related to the countryside or to towns?
- Look out for features of the urban landscape that are represented in symbols on the OS map. Start by looking at modes of transport (eg junctions of main roads, railways, ports and airports).
- Look for rural features. Study the key carefully to see what different areas of shading on the map represent. For example, different types of farmland will be shaded differently.
- Study the relief of the land on your OS map by looking for the contour lines. Contours will show you where the hills (elevations) and valleys (depressions) are on the map. Contours will often show changes in height of 5 or 10 metres. The closer the contours are together the steeper the slope is. If the contours are far apart, you might be looking at a flat flood plain. On the map below the contours in square **1981** are quite close together - indicating a fairly steep gradient.



# Geography Enrolment Task: Geography of Hereford Sixth Form College Campus

To complete this task you will need to register with digimap which is a subscription mapping site available to our students, (see overleaf). You will not be able to use digimap until you have enrolled at college, but you may wish to make an early start on the task by being observant as you walk round the college campus and using google maps to work out the location (see below).

**TASK:** Write a mini essay of about 500 words describing the geography of Hereford Sixth Form College campus. There should be one section about the physical geography of the campus and another on the human geography. The questions below are to give you ideas and get you thinking. Do not list or bullet point. **Write your essay in full sentences and paragraphs. Type your work ideally in a word document and complete it by 9<sup>th</sup> September 2026.** The aim of this task is to familiarise you with a powerful online mapping tool and start to get you thinking as a geographer!

## Sources of information:

Digimap website – Ordnance Survey Maps

Google Maps and any other useful websites or books

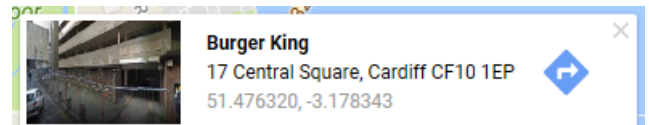
Digimap website – Historical Ordnance Survey Maps

Your own observations as a geographer on campus

Digimap website – Geological maps

## Physical Geography of the college campus

**Location of the campus – What is the latitude and longitude of the campus?** - Latitude measures how far locations are from the equator in degrees. Latitude ranges from 0° at the equator to 90° N at the North Pole or 90° S at the South Pole. Longitude measures distance west or east from the prime meridian (which is at Greenwich, London) in degrees. It is either west or east and goes from 0° at London to 180° in the Pacific Ocean. Click to create a “pin” on any location in *google maps* to get the latitude and longitude eg this shows Burger King in Cardiff City Centre has a latitude of 51.5° N and a longitude of 3.2° W (the minus means west for longitude readings and south for latitude readings).



**What is the altitude above sea level in metres?** – look for contour lines and spot heights on the Ordnance Survey maps.

**What is the name of the hill the campus is located on?** – place names are shown on Ordnance Survey maps.

**What is the land area of the campus in m<sup>2</sup>?** Digimap has measurement tools (see sidebar – make sure you use the area tool not the distance one!) that will calculate this. Or you can print out a map of campus and draw a grid on it and estimate the area by counting the number of grid squares it covers. Your answer should be in metres squared (m<sup>2</sup>)

**What is the bedrock (solid) geology?** – use the *information icon* to click on the geological map on digimap to discover the geology at a site. You should be able to find out the name of the rock (rock unit), the type of rock, and the age of the rock. Digimap will just tell you the name of the geological epoch (time period) – google this to find out how many years ago the rock under our feet was formed.

**What is the superficial geology?** – Superficial geology means the sediment that rests on top of the rocks. Sediment is normally deposited by rivers or ice. Use the *information icon* to click on the geological map on digimap to discover what sort of superficial geology (sediment) covers part of the college campus near Folly Lane at a site.

**In which river drainage basin is the campus?** – When rain lands on the college campus it will flow along the surface downhill to a river. Which river drains the rainwater from the college campus? Look very carefully at the contour lines on the Ordnance Survey map to see which way the ground the college is built on is sloping and where the water will go.

## Human Geography of the college campus

**What is the approximate population of the college?** - How many students and staff work on the college campus each day?

**What is the population density of the site in persons per m<sup>2</sup>?** - Population density = population ÷ land area (see physical geography section above for this).

**How has this place changed?** - What was this place like before the 3 colleges were built? The Technical College opened on Folly Lane in the mid 1950s. Our Sixth Form College opened in 1973. Use historical Ordnance Survey maps on digimap to discover what this place was like/used for before the colleges were built. Is there anything left on campus from before the 3 colleges were built?

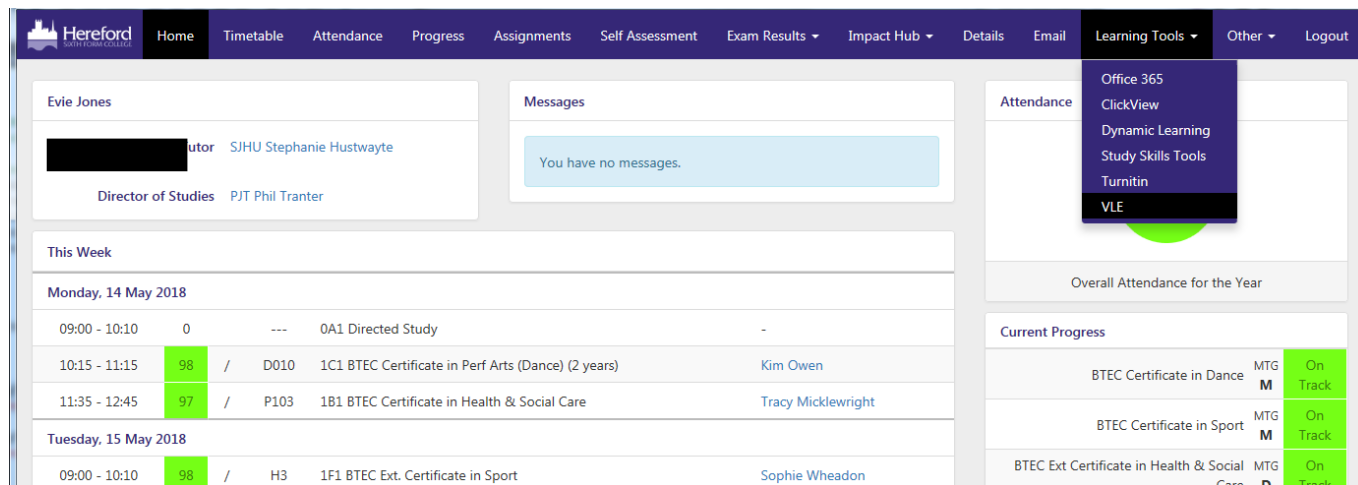
**How is the college campus represented/branded?** – look on google images – what kind of images appear near the top of the search page. How does the college portray and brand itself? What is the logo? What does it represent? What are the main buildings on campus named after? Why?

ARI (May 2026)

Full instructions on how to access digimap can be found using the link on your Geography Teams assignment. You will be added to a Microsoft Team for your geography class when you are enrolled at college

**From inside college:**

Log on to a college computer. Your username will be your initials and a four digit number. You can find your username on your college ID card. You will set up your password on the enrolment day. Open the Internet and the default page will be the student portal. This contains details of your timetable and other details. On the top of the screen pull down the menu “Learning Tools” and select Office 365.



**From outside college:**

Log onto a computer and go to the main college webpage ([www.hereford.ac.uk](http://www.hereford.ac.uk)). From here select the Student Portal and log on using your college username and password. Once on the student portal select the Office 365 as described above.

Once logged into your Office 365 area open the Microsoft Teams app and select your geography class team. In the assignment area you will find Digimap Enrolment Task will full instructions on how to register.